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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research project was to identify potential dropouts among entering freshmen at Kingsborough Community College (KCC) and some of the characteristics that might be related to the decision to leave college prior to earning the associate degree. Results of a survey of the Fall 1978 incoming freshmen provided descriptive data concerning this group, as well as statistical information concerning the relationships between students' intention to persist at KCC and student background factors. An analysis of these factors indicated that high school average, curriculum at KCC, reason for going to college, certainty of occupational objective, parents' attitude toward college, and rating of KCC as a place to get an education were significantly related to intention to persist at KCC. Practical conclusions that may be drawn from these findings include the following: (1) curricular offerings need to be closely related to realistic career and job opportunities; (2) subjects should be presented as functionally relevant; (3) ongoing educational and vocational guidance is needed to help students crystalize, clarify, and/or revise academic and career goals; (4) individual counseling is desirable to encourage persistence; and (5) a required "Student Development" or "Freshman Colloquium" course may be advisable in order to assist students with academic, vocational, and personal concerns. (Author/EB)

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Identifying Problems and Potential Drop-Outs Among College Freshmen

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Kingsborough Community College

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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UD 019623

IDENTIFYING PROBLEMS AND POTENTIAL DROP-OUTS AMONG COLLEGE FRESHMEN

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Kingsborough Community College (KCC)

The problem of attrition has been a vital concern of college educators and administrators throughout the country. Besides its budgetary effects which frequently threaten the very existence of an institution, its social and educational implications are far reaching. A review of the literature reveals numerous studies, particularly during the last ten years, aiming to determine reasons for attrition and to discover variables associated with lack of persistence in a college program.

In an attempt to investigate the multiple causes of withdrawal and the characteristics which might identify the non-persister, Bossen & Burnett (1970) found that the probability of withdrawal was greater among married students, those from a lower socio-economic status, those taking 6 or less credits of coursework, and those who did not have any job. According to Chase (1965), poor adjustment to college life, lack of personal attention, and lack of clear vocational goals, are the major reported reasons for leaving college. Among the other variables reported associated with attrition are cumulative environmental pressure from home, family and personal problems (Berger 1966), SCAT scores (Chambers 1965), Mathematics aptitude (Bayer 1968), average GPA (Aiken 1968), High School average (Black 1969), sex and declared major (Rice 1969), reason for attending college (Weigel 1969), and several personality traits (Hannah 1971).

Though numerous studies are concerned with the follow-up of students who have dropped out of a particular college, hardly any attention is focused upon the student contemplating a change in college plans. Research data gathered from college drop-outs, may enable us to infer appropriate steps for the prevention of further attrition. Data derived from students contemplating withdrawal, however, should yield more direct evidence of factors motivating this intention and ultimately prove more useful in preventing it from coming to fruition.

The purpose of the current research project was therefore, to identify potential drop-outs among the incoming freshmen students of K.C.C. and some of the characteristics that might be related to the decision to leave the college prior to earning the

associate degree. It is recognized that a student's intention to discontinue studies at K.C.C. (as would be the case with other colleges) may be motivated by a re-evaluation in educational and vocational goals necessitating a change in schools, the desire to attend the college of first choice previously not attainable, or a temporary personal need, as well as uncertainty or disenchantment with regard to a college education. Nevertheless, bearing these qualifications in mind, it is anticipated that the data accumulated should shed additional light upon the problem of attrition and suggest measures to reduce its magnitude. At the least, it is expected that the information gathered will assist the counselors in dealing with the concerns revealed by their assigned students, and possibly effect changes in the desirable direction.

METHOD AND RESULTS

The attached questionnaire was completed by most of the Fall'78 incoming Freshmen during the second month of their stay at K.C.C. Not all forms were returned to the researcher and some were received too late to be processed. The final sample consisted of 1610 responses.

The results of the survey reveal some interesting descriptive data concerning the incoming freshmen population of K.C.C., as well as significant and suggestive statistical relationships between intention to persist at K.C.C. and student background factors. The descriptive data is summarized in the tables below. It is to be noted that the "total number" is generally less than the total number of responses (1610) since some students did not respond, or responded "out of range", to specific items. The "percent" frequency has, therefore, also been adjusted accordingly.

KINGSBOROUGH COMMUNITY COLLEGE of the City University of New York

Dear Student:

This questionnaire has been prepared to survey your needs and concerns so that we can be of greatest assistance to you to insure your success at our college. Please complete this form to the best of your ability and return it to your English teacher, the next time you come to class.

Thank you

Eric Willner, Ph.D.
Coordinator of Academic Counseling

INSTRUCTIONS FOR COMPLETION OF QUESTIONNAIRE

After reading each question, choose from the answers that follow the one which best applies to you. Write the number of that answer on the line in the right margin, corresponding to that question.

1. Your age: (1) Under 21 (2) 21-24 (3) 25-29 (4) 30-39 (5) 40-49 (6) 50 & over 1._____

2. Your sex: (1) Male (2) Female 2._____

3. Total income of family in which you grew up (from all sources, before taxes) 3._____
   (1) less than $3,000 (2) $3,000-$5,999 (3) $6,000-$8,999
   (4) $9,000-$11,999 (5) $12,000-$14,999 (6) $15,000-$19,999
   (7) $20,000-$24,999 (8) $25,000 or more

4. Your approximate High School average: (1) 90-100 (2) 80-89 (3) 70-79 4._____
   (4) 60-69 (5) under 60 (6) GED

5. Your Curriculum at K.C.C.: (I1) LIBERAL ARTS (I2) A SCIENCE 5._____
   (13) MATH or COMPUTER SCIENCE (14) FINE ARTS (15) MUSIC
   (16) THEATRE or RADIO (17) ACCOUNTING (18) BUSINESS
   (19) DATA PROCESSING (20) EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION
   (21) MENTAL HEALTH (22) NURSING (23) RECREATION (24) SECRETARIAL SCIENCE

6. How many credits and/or equated credits are you taking this semester? 6._____
   (If you are not sure how to figure equated credits, ask your English teacher to help you.) (1) 3-6 (2) 7-9 (3) 10-12 (4) 13-15 (5) 16 or more

7. How many hours a week are you working on a job? 7._____
   (1) no job (2) 1-10 hrs. (3) 11-20 hrs. (4) 21-30 hrs.
   (5) more than 30 hrs.

8. Your major reason for going to College: (1) to prepare for a career 8._____
   (2) to gain more knowledge, which I enjoy (3) it was expected of me
   (4) to make new friends (5) nothing better to do (6) other:_____
   _____ specify

9. Your occupational objective: (1) I have already decided on an occupational objective (2) I have some occupational objective in mind, but am not certain (3) I have no particular occupational objective in mind as yet 9._____

10. Your parents' attitude toward college: (1) positive (2) divided opinions (3) apathetic (don't care) (4) negative (5) does not apply 10._____

11. Your friends' attitude toward college: (1) positive (2) divided opinions (3) apathetic (don't care) (4) negative (5) does not apply 11._____

12. How do you rate K.C.C. as a place to get an education? (1) good (2) satisfactory (3) unsatisfactory (4) no opinion yet, or not sure 12._____

13. Do you intend to continue at K.C.C. until you earn your Associate degree? (1) yes (2) no (3) not sure 13._____

14. In which of the areas below would you like assistance? (Indicate as many as you want.) 14._____
(0) career choice (1) curriculum requirements (2) study habits _____
(3) academic attitudes (4) possible need of tutoring (5) financial _____
problem (6) reading comprehension (7) handling personal problem _____
(8) none (9) other: (describe) _____

15. Would you be willing to devote about one extra period a week in a group program designed to assist you in the areas you checked above (or any other area) to improve your chances for success at K.C.C.? (1) yes (2) no 15._____

PRINT LAST NAME, FIRST _____ ADDRESS _____ PHONE _____

DESCRIPTIVE DATA

TABLE 1
AGE DISTRIBUTION OF INCOMING FRESHMEN

AGE	NUMBER	PERCENT
Under 21	1387	86.5
21 - 29	155	9.6
30 & Above	62	3.9
TOTAL	1604	100.0

TABLE 2
SEX DISTRIBUTION OF INCOMING FRESHMEN

	NUMBER	PERCENT
MALE	632	39.4
FEMALE	974	60.6
TOTAL	1606	100.0

TABLE 3
FAMILY INCOME OF INCOMING FRESHMEN

FAMILY INCOME	NUMBER	PERCENT
Less than $6,000	257	20.5
$6,000 - 8,999	179	14.3
9,000 - 11,999	176	14.1
12,000- 14,999	171	13.7
15,000- 19,999	197	15.8
20,000- 24,999	133	10.6
25,000 and above	137	11.0
TOTAL	1250	100.0

TABLE 4
HIGH SCHOOL AVERAGE OF INCOMING FRESHMEN

*AVERAGE	NUMBER	PERCENT
90 - 100	37	2.4
80 - 89	546	34.9
70 - 79	799	51.1
60 - 69	71	4.5
Under 60	1	0.1
GED	109	7.0
	1563	100.0

*not same as "college admissions average"

TABLE 5
CURRICULUM OF INCOMING FRESHMEN

CURRICULA	NUMBER	PERCENT
LIB.ARTS	383	24.2
SCIENCE	78	4.9
MATH	41	2.6
FINE ARTS	22	1.4
MUSIC	27	1.7
THEATRE	35	2.2
ACCOUNT.	177	11.2
BUSINESS	258	16.3
DATA PROC.	91	5.7
E.CHILD.ED.	33	2.1
MENT. HEALTH	34	2.1
NURSING	114	7.2
RECREATION	30	1.9
SEC. SCIENCE	261	16.5
TOTAL	1584	100.0

TABLE 6
CRS. CR EQU. CRS. OF INCOMING FRESHMEN

*CRS.-EQU.CRS.	NUMBER	PERCENT
3 - 6	73	4.7
7 - 9	131	8.4
10 - 12	338	21.6
13 - 15	677	43.3
16 or more	344	22.0
TOTAL	1563	100.0

* It must be noted that the concept of "equated crs" was not adequately explained to some of the classes. Hence, it is very likely that some students who indicated that they are taking 3-6 or 7-9 crs-equ.crs. considered only credit bearing courses.

TABLE 7
HOURS WORKING

NO. OF HRS.	NUMBER	PERCENT
0	942	59.7
1 - 10	141	8.9
11- 20	276	17.5
21- 30	152	9.7
over 30	66	4.2
TOTAL	1577	100.0

TABLE 8
REASON FOR GOING TO COLLEGE

REASON	NUMBER	PERCENT
CAREER	1389	87.1
KNOWLEDGE	129	8.1
EXPECTED	34	2.1
FRIENDS	3	0.2
NOTHING BETTER	12	0.8
OTHER	27	1.7
	1594	100.0

TABLE 9
CERTAINTY OF OCCUPATIONAL OBJECTIVE

CERTAINTY	NUMBER	PERCENT
DECIDED	718	45.8
SOME IDEA	681	43.5
NO IDEA	168	10.7
TOTAL	1567	100.0

TABLE 10
PARENTS' ATTITUDE TOWARD COLLEGE

PARENTS' ATTIT.	NUMBER	PERCENT
POSITIVE	1377	87.4
DIVIDED	89	5.6
APATHETIC	37	2.3
NEGATIVE	5	0.4
DOESN'T APPLY	68	4.3
TOTAL	1576	100.0

TABLE 11
FRIENDS' ATTITUDE TOWARD COLLEGE

FRIENDS' ATTIT.	NUMBER	PERCENT
POSITIVE	854	53.8
DIVIDED	557	35.1
APATHETIC	66	4.2
NEGATIVE	35	2.2
DOESN'T APPLY	75	4.7
TOTAL	1587	100.0

TABLE 12
VIEW OF EDUCATION AT KCC

RATING	NUMBER	PERCENT
GOOD	727	45.8
SATISF.	481	30.3
UNSATISF.	10	0.6
NO OPINION	371	23.3
TOTAL	1589	100.0

TABLE 13
INTENTION TO STAY AT KCC FOR DEGREE

PERSIST AT KCC	NUMBER	PERCENT
YES	1108	69.8
NO	101	6.4
NOT SURE	378	23.8
TOTAL	1587	100.0

TABLE 14
AREAS IN WHICH ASSISTANCE SOUGHT

AREA	NUMBER	PERCENT
CAREER CHOICE	571	36.5
CURR. REQUIREM.	765	48.9
STUDY HABITS	366	23.4
ACAD.ATTITUDES	98	6.3
NEED TUTORING	329	21.0
FINANCIAL AID	386	24.6
READING COMPREH.	200	12.8
PERSONAL PROBLEM	104	6.6
NONE	262	16.7
*TOTAL	3081	196.7

*Since students were able to check more than one area of concern, the total number is larger than 1610 and the percentage higher than 100%.

TABLE 15
WILLINGNESS TO JOIN GROUP COUNSELING PROGRA

WILLINGNESS	NUMBER	PERCENT
YES	929	57.7
NO	453	28.1
? & NO RESP.	228	14.2
TOTAL	1610	100.0

TABLE 16
ENGLISH CLASS OF INCOMING FRESHMEN

CLASS	NUMBER	PERCENT
ENG 12	676	42.0
ENG 11	223	13.9
ENG 01	711	44.1
TOTAL	1610	100.0

CROSSTABULATIONS

INTENT TO PERSIST BY BACKGROUND FACTORS

In addition to the descriptive data summarized in tables 1-16, crosstabulations were obtained to depict the relationship between each of the background factors considered in the survey (questions 1-12), and intent to persist at KCC (question 13). The chi square test was used to determine the statistical significance of the relationship. As per convention in the social and behavioral sciences, a relationship which has the probability of occuring by chance 5 percent of the time or less (considering the degrees of freedom), has been accepted as statistically significant. The crosstabulations which turned out to be statistically significant are shown in tables 17-22 below. They comprise the following variables, significantly related to intention to persist at KCC until the associate degree is earned: high school average, curriculum at KCC, reason for going to college, certainty of occupational objective, parents' attitude toward college, and rating of KCC as a place to get an education.

CROSS TABULATIONS
(COUNT AND ROW PERCENT)

TABLE 17

HIGH SCHOOL AVERAGE & INTENT TO PERSIST AT KCC

	YES	NO	NOT SURE	ROW TOTAL
90-100	25	3	9	37
	67.6	8.1	24.3	2.4
80-89	399	25	119	543
	73.5	4.6	21.9	35.2
70-79	524	57	204	785
	66.8	7.3	26.0	50.9
60-69	36	6	27	69
	52.2	8.7	39.1	4.5
UNDER 60	0	1	0	1
	0.0	100.0	0.0	0.1
GED	87	6	13	106
	82.1	5.7	12.3	6.9
COLUMN TOTAL	1071	98	372	1541
	69.5	6.4	24.1	100.0

Raw chi square = 41.55336 (10 df). Signif.= 0.0000

TABLE 18

CURRICULUM & INTENT TO PERSIST AT KCC

	YES	NO	NOT SURE	ROW TOTAL
LIB.ARTS	219	47	110	376
	58.2	12.5	29.3	24.1
SCIENCE	49	6	22	77
	63.6	7.8	28.6	4.9
MATH,C.S.	32	2	6	40
	80.0	5.0	15.0	2.6
FINE ARTS	13	4	5	22
	59.1	18.2	22.7	1.4
MUSIC	17	3	7	27
	63.0	11.1	25.9	1.7
THEATRE	24	2	9	35
	68.6	5.7	25.7	2.2
ACCOUNTING	125	8	41	174
	71.8	4.6	23.6	11.1
BUSINESS	169	10	75	254
	66.5	3.9	29.5	16.3
DATA PROC.	72	2	16	90
	80.0	2.2	17.8	5.8
E.CHILD ED.	29	1	3	33
	87.9	3.0	9.1	2.1
M.HEALTH	25	0	6	31
	80.6	0.0	19.4	2.0
NURSING	91	2	20	113
	80.5	1.8	17.7	7.2
RECREAT.	24	3	3	30
	80.0	10.0	10.0	1.9
SEC-SCI.	202	10	48	260
	77.7	3.8	18.5	16.6
COLUMN	1091	100	371	1562
TOTAL	69.8	6.4	23.8	100.0

Raw chi square = 82.88533 (26 df).Signf=0.0000

TABLE 19

REASON FOR GOING TO COLLEGE & INTENT TO PERSIST AT KCC

	YES	NO	NOT SURE	ROW TOTAL
CAREER	975	80	316	1371
	71.1	5.8	23.0	87.3
KNOWLEDGE	85	11	30	126
	67.5	8.7	23.8	8.0
EXPECTED	20	2	11	33
	60.6	6.1	33.3	2.1
FRIENDS	2	0	1	3
	66.7	0.0	33.3	0.2
NOTHING	2	3	7	12
BETTER	16.7	25.0	58.3	0.8
OTHER	16	3	7	26
	61.5	11.5	26	1.7
COLUMN	1100	99	372	1571
TOTAL	70.0	6.3	23.7	100.0

Raw chi square=23.40454 (10 df). Signif.=0.0093

TABLE 20

OCCUPATIONAL DECISION & INTENT TO PERSIST AT KC

	YES	NO	NOT SURE	ROW TOTAL
DECIDED	550	51	112	713
	77.1	7.2	15.7	45.9
SOME IDEA	435	33	209	677
	64.3	4.9	30.9	43.5
NONE	103	16	46	165
	62.4	9.7	27.9	10.6
COLUMN	1088	100	367	1555
TOTAL	70.0	6.4	23.6	100.0

Raw chi square = 50.86789 (4 df).
Signif. = 0.0000

TABLE 21

PARENTS' ATTITUDE & INTENT TO PERSIST AT KCC

	YES	NO	NOT SURE	ROW TOTAL
POSITIVE	969	88	313	1370
	70.7	6.4	22.8	87.6
DIVIDED	51	4	31	86
	59.3	4.7	36.0	5.5
APATHETIC	23	4	10	37
	62.2	10.8	27.0	2.4
NEGATIVE	1	0	3	4
	25.0	0.0	75.0	0.3
DOESN'T	51	4	12	67
APPLY	76.1	6.0	17.9	4.3
COLUMN	1095	100	369	1564
TOTAL	70.0	6.4	23.6	100.0

Raw chi square=16.72267 (8 df)Signif.=0.03

TABLE 22

VIEW OF EDUCATION AT KCC & INTENT TO PERSIST AT KCC

	YES	NO	NOT SURE	ROW TOTAL
GOOD	571	30	119	720
	79.3	4.2	16.5	45.7
SATISF.	318	36	123	477
	66.7	7.5	25.8	30.2
UNSAT.	2	4	4	10
	20.0	40.0	40.0	0.6
NO OPIN.	211	31	128	370
	57.0	8.4	34.6	23.5
COLUMN	1102	101	374	1577
TOTAL	69.9	6.4	23.7	100.0

Raw chi square=84.77196 (6 df)
Signif.=0.0000

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This study was designed to identify potential dropouts among the Fall 1978 incoming freshmen students of Kingsborough Community College, and some of the characteristics that might be related to the decision to leave the college prior to earning the Associate degree.

A questionnaire was administered in most freshman English classes during the second month of the Fall semester, and 1,610 completed questionnaires were processed.

It was found that 6.4% of the freshmen do not intend to continue their studies at Kingsborough Community College until they earn the Associate degree, and that 24% expressed uncertainty of that fact. The descriptive data of this class reveals the following:

a) Close to 60% of the students do not hold any job; of the 40% who do, 14% work more than 20 hours a week.

b) Over 87% cite "to prepare for a career" as their major reason for going to college.

c) More than 54% are undecided or uncertain about their occupational objective.

d) More than 87% indicate that their parents' attitude toward college is positive.

e) Close to 5[illegible]% indicate that their friend's attitude toward college is positive.

f) Close to 46% rate KCC as a "good" place to get an education; slightly over 35% rate it as "satisfactory"; over 23% indicate "no opinion as yet or not sure"; and only 0.6% rate KCC as "unsatisfactory".

g) The areas in which the freshmen seek assistance are listed below in rank order, according to prevalence cited:

1.	curriculum requirements	48.9%
2.	career choice	36.5%
3	financial aid	24.6%
4.	study habits	23.4%
5.	need tutoring	21.0%

6. none 16.7%

7. reading comprehension 12.8%

8. personal problem 6.6%

9. academic attitudes 6.3%

h) Close to 58% expressed willingness "to devote about one extra hour a week in a group program" designed to assist them in their areas of concern.

An analysis of the association between each of the background factors considered in the survey (questions 1-12) and intent to persist at KCC (question 13), using the chi square test revealed that high school average, curriculum, reason for going to college, certainty of occupational objective, parents' attitude toward college, and rating of KCC as a place to get an education, were significantly related to intention to persist at KCC. Among the students manifesting the largest percentages of persisters were:

a) those with general Equivalency Diplomas, and with High School averages from 70-89

b) those in career programs, particularly the health careers

c) those who cite "to prepare for a career" as their major reason for going to college

d) those who indicate that they have "already decided on an occupational objective"

e) those independent of their parents, and those whose parents' attitude toward college is cited as positive

f) and those who rate KCC as a good place to get an education

Some of the manifested associations between background factors and attrition are in conformances with those previously cited (Black 1969, Rice 1969, Weigel 1969). Our findings linking career orientation to intention to persist at KCC, are also in harmony with those of a more recent study (Steele 1978) which indicates that "student dissatisfaction with progress toward career and academic goals was an area most likely to be a cause of attrition".

A number of practical conclusions may be drawn from this study, suggesting necessary means to minimize retention:

1. To attract and retain students, curricular offerings need be closely related to realistic career and job opportunities.

2. To maintain students' interest, subjects should be presented as functionally relevant, whenever possible, even if they do not relate to a specific vocation or profession. The connection between liberal arts and life enrichment need also be clarified.

3. Intensive ongoing educational and vocational counseling is needed to assist students whose academic and career goals need crystalization, clarification, or revision. Since the majority of our incoming freshmen start out undecided or uncertain of their occupational objective, the enormity of this task and the professional staff required to execute it, becomes readily apparent.

4. Since the study has identified most incoming freshmen who are contemplating withdrawing from the college prior to earning the Associate degree, individual counseling to encourage persistence if desirable, may be instituted, given sufficient student personnel faculty.

5. Considering the fact that the vast majority of students desire assistance with academic, vocational or personal concerns, the advisability of a required "Student Development" or "Freshman Colloquium" course, in addition to continued voluntary one-to-one counseling, cannot be overlooked.

In times of financial crises, college administrations are generally under much pressure to reduce personnel, particularly in areas considered "non-academic" or a luxury. Much farsightedness is required to avoid this temptation, and to recognize the less tangible and often less apparent needs for the survival of an institution and its educational mission.

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